

Heritage Lessons

summer 2003



Bringing you the People and Places of Heritage Education — Louisiana

The study of cultural landscapes is really the study of place and of human interaction with the environment. I first formally studied cultural landscapes in a graduate seminar entitled Community History, and our subject for the entire year was Blue Ridge Tuberculosis Sanatorium. Each classmate undertook one aspect of the landscape to research (such as the hospital buildings, the staff housing, and the dairies), and then we used the research to create different ways to educate others about this important place, in hopes of its preservation. One project was a website (www.faculty.virginia.edu/blueridgesanatorium)

This summer, for a pilot project of the Historic American Landscapes Survey, I have researched Briarwood: the Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve in Saline, Louisiana. The objective is to document the current condition of the site, as well as the history of the site. Being a landscape study, many different subjects must be considered:

Geography— Where is Briarwood? What is the topography? What water features are there? Does season affect the water level?

Biology— What kinds of plants are at Briarwood? Are they native or exotic? What kinds of animals can be seen at Briarwood?

Living Landscapes

*By Rebecca Howell, historian,
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Briarwood Nature Preserve, the home of the legendary naturalist, Caroline Dormon, provides many opportunities for heritage education studies.

Architecture— What buildings are there? How old are they? Who built them?

Engineering— Are there reasons why the paths go where they do? What kinds of utilities are there?

Humans affect the answers to all of these questions, and traditional historical documents can assist in understanding the motivation behind human choices. Through the use of Caroline Dormon's books and articles, letters and diaries, as well as the newsletters of the Nature Preserve and interviews with the curators of Briarwood, I have been able to find out why Briarwood looks the way it does, bringing his-

tory to the present.

A cultural landscape can be any (human-occupied) place, which benefits the feasibility of undertaking a cultural landscape study. Even a school would be an excellent study, crossing several disciplines and appropriate for many levels. Take a survey of the school property and take note of the sensory experience. Look at the school building and draw a picture of it. Listen to the passing cars, the lawnmower, the band practicing. Smell what the cafeteria is cooking or what plants are blooming. Back inside the school, note how the halls are decorated, how the different

rooms are arranged and how they are furnished. Return to the classroom and practice deduction skills. A playground might signal there are young children, while a football field may mean there are older students, just as younger students usually have desks for storing their books, while older students have lockers. A high school might need more parking spaces than a school for students too young to drive. Portable classrooms might indicate the school district is growing quickly. Then move on to research to find out more about the history of the school.

Interview teachers and alumni and look at old yearbooks to find out what the school used to be like. Find architectural blueprints and newspaper articles to find out when the school was built and if additions have occurred. Study Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps to see how the neighborhood has changed over time.

The use of primary documents like these, in combination with tangible subject matter, will not only bring history to life for students, but also encourage them to consider themselves as participants in their cultural landscape.

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Heritage Education Assists Goals of SACS Effort

Sharon Dooley, *St. Catherine of Siena School, Metairie*

Anyone associated with an institution that has undergone Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) evaluation can appreciate the organization's rigorous standards.

Teacher Sharon Dooley's school underwent SACS evaluation, recommending her focus on such broad areas as "Learning to Learn Skills", "Integrated Knowledge," and "Communication Skills." Though each of those areas went well beyond the concept of the "three Rs," Dooley's experience with Heritage Education—Louisiana made her aware of how to take the SACS recommendations and build on them for the benefit of her students.

"I felt all three areas could be covered by designing a program that included Louisiana History concepts and standards but that allowed deviation from the text," Dooley said. "I had the pleasure of attending several Heritage Education seminars and learned so many hands on ideas to enliven my curriculum."

Dooley selected Longue Vue House and Gardens, where she had been a volunteer for twelve years and developed a love of the historic home.

"Each year I choose a theme around which to coordinate my units and last year, after attending the Heritage Education Workshop, I felt 'legacy and preservation' would be ideal. The Stern Family, the original owners of Longue Vue, gifted their home to the people of New Orleans and



Students from Sharon Dooley's classroom presented a living history project titled "Morning at Longue Vue" as part of their heritage education project.

as such, their legacy continues as a private foundation opens the house and grounds to the public."

Each decision, from the invitations to the final presentation to the cover of the book that they created, was made by Dooley's students. They photographed and sketched the home and gardens, researched the biographies of the founders and creators of Longue Vue and went many days after school to interview the people who care for the museum and grounds.

To showcase its work, the class compiled a CD and a lengthy book. The culminating project was a celebration of their group effort.

Each student had a role in their "Morning at Longue Vue," a living history. They performed as the Stern family, the landscape architect, builders and gardeners. Attending were their parents and grandparents, Longue Vue personnel, faculty and the Heritage Education—

Louisiana staff. All the while, the Longue Vue Foundation supported their efforts by giving personal interviews and by allowing the students exclusive use of the grounds the morning of the presentation.

In their reflections after the program the students felt pride in their efforts. Many appreciated being in control of the project and having their input and decisions valued.

According to Dooley, "They learned about the Stern legacy from the inside out and found that constant preservation efforts are necessary by people with a variety of skills to keep the Stern's gift alive for the present and the future. I think they left eighth grade with a deeper appreciation for their city as a whole."

The three components of the SACS evaluation were covered in depth. They learned to learn through being in control of the grant; the knowledge was integrated in that architecture, history, geography, computer and art skills were combined. The personal interviews and acting in the living history drew upon communication skills some students didn't know they even had. One parent, in a thank you letter, said that the program helped her daughter to grow in self assuredness.

"NCPTT labels its gifts as 'mini grants,' but the benefits to students are so far reaching that words cannot express the impact," Dooley said. "Thank you for the grant opportunity and the chance to tell people about the wonderful experience it afforded my students."

Weblinks

www.tclf.org The Cultural Landscape Foundation: definitions, *Cultural Landscapes as Classrooms*, and much more.

www2.cr.nps.gov/hli/index.htm National Park Service Historic Landscape Initiative: information about cultural landscapes and stewardship.

www.netscape.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/ National Geographic: Lessons, maps, and other resources.

www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/ Teaching with Historic Places: various products and activities to bring historic places into the classroom.

Heritage Education—Louisiana New Brochures

New brochures include

- Information about Mini Grants.
- Workshop information.
- Comments from teachers and students.

To request a brochure, contact Kim Bowen at 318-356-7444. A downloadable version is available at www.heritage-ed.com.



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